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**HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DIVISION**  
**EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE:**  
**A COMPARISON OF ADMINISTRATION METHODOLOGY**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Why worry about what an employee who is quitting state government thinks about his or her employment experience?* After all, with the budget situation state government is currently facing, agencies could probably look upon such activity with a certain amount of relief and not need to be concerned with why he or she left.

The absurdity of this statement is obvious, and in fact, it is useful to understand why people, especially high performers, are leaving. Despite the best efforts toward hiring the right people and creating a supportive work environment, employees leave. Sometimes the reasons may have nothing to do with the organization; at other times there is a direct correlation between their departure and dissatisfaction with the organization. People change, situations evolve, procedures become outdated, managers become less consistent in how they interact with people. If an organization is proactive in its approach towards getting the most “bang for the buck”, it looks at the work environment before employees leave in order to find ways to improve employee retention. In addition to conducting employee satisfaction surveys and questionnaires, organizations need to conduct exit interviews. Many organizations do, either in person or via a mailed survey.<sup>1</sup>

The exit interview serves a number of important functions. It is more than just the necessary evil it is sometimes construed to be. It may help an organization to realize when certain problems exist that might not otherwise be apparent.<sup>2</sup> When trends in voluntary separation are tracked, the firm may be provided a valuable heads up

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Levin and Joseph Rosse, Talent Flow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press, 2001), pp. 112-114.

<sup>2</sup>Don H. Harris, “The Benefits of the Exit Interview,” Information Systems Management 17 (Summer 2000): 17-20.

concerning many different issues such as discrimination problems. If a trend reveals that an inordinate number of women and minorities are resigning, there could be a lack of appropriate advancement opportunities. Valuable feedback concerning training and staff development can be obtained from the exit interview. If employees feel they are not properly trained to perform the responsibilities of their job, they may leave. Benefits and compensation are other areas about which the exit interview can provide valuable information. The interview can also send the message that the organization values the opinions and feedback of the employee.<sup>3</sup>

In order for the information an employee shares on an exit interview to be reliable, the employee must believe that something will be done with the interview other than simply being filed away, or worse, destroyed without ever even being read. For that reason, it is extremely important the organization convey to the employee the importance it places on employee feedback.

Not only is it important that the right questions be asked of the exiting employee, but also just as important is the manner in which the questions are asked. Research seems to suggest that the employees will be more willing to share negative information with an outside consultant or with an objective third party.<sup>4</sup> Often these interviewers are trained in asking probing questions and can elicit more detailed information. Such interviews are best conducted in a face-to-face manner, in a setting that is considered less threatening, such as the Human Resources office. Some have even suggested conducting the interviews at locations where the atmosphere is relaxed such as coffee houses or

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<sup>3</sup>Patricia M. Buhler, "The Exit Interview: A Goldmine of Information," Supervision 63 (April 2002): 15-17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.17.

restaurants.<sup>5</sup> The worst possible scenario appears to be one in which the employee is given a questionnaire to complete by the immediate supervisor or someone in the employee's office who would not be considered by the employee to be an objective third party. The premise here then, from the exiting employee's perspective, is the less personally involved in the factors surrounding the individual's decision to leave the questioner is, the more objective he or she will be with the information obtained; and conversely, the more involved a questioner is the more likely they are to have a self-interest in the questionnaire.<sup>6</sup> The employee may believe, correctly or incorrectly, that the more negative responses are, the greater the likelihood is that there will be negative repercussions, which could result in some type of retaliation by management towards the employee. The employee may believe that such responses could be an act of "burning bridges" and therefore choose to let the problems of that organization be someone else's worry.

In order to obtain information, which truly reflects the attitudes of the exiting employees, the Department of Social Services revised the method of administering the questionnaires. As of August 2000, exiting employees are no longer given the exit interview questionnaire directly by the supervisor or office personnel liaison prior to the last day of employment. The new method of administering the questionnaire is to have the Human Resource Management office send the form to the employee's home address, after the employee's last day with the agency. Upon completion, the employee is

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<sup>5</sup>Donna French, "Gleaning Value from the Exit Interview," Association Management 54 (June 2002): 72.

<sup>6</sup>John R. Hinrichs, "Measurement of Reasons for Resignation of Professionals: Questionnaire Versus Company and Consultant Exit Interviews," Journal of Applied Psychology 60 (August 1975): 530-532.

instructed to return the questionnaire to the Human Resource Management office in an envelope provided for that purpose. Although this method does not go as far as the direct interview method, it is deemed to be a better method of administration than was the previous procedure. It is on the comparison of the different manners in which the questionnaires are administered that this study is focused. It is the proposition of this examiner that there should be a significant difference in responses between the two groups of employees.

## II. STUDY PROCEDURES

### A. Selection Methods

The two groups of 100 exiting employees that were sampled were drawn from the groups of employees who resigned in Fiscal Year 1999-2000 (*Before*) and in Fiscal Year 2001-2002 (*After*). Because the number of exit interviews was more than 800 for each group, it was decided that a random sample would be drawn from each population. This was done by placing each group in stacks that had been shuffled, and then every third form was selected until 100 were drawn from each stack.

### B. Exit Interview Questionnaire Description

The Department of Social Services Exit Interview Questionnaire is given to all employees who resign, but not to those who have been terminated. It consists of four sections. (See Appendix A) The initial section is identifying information about the employee, and the final section is three open-ended questions. This information was not used in this study. The remainder of the questionnaire is comprised of the two

sections which are the focal points of this study. The first section consists of seven yes/no questions and an eighth question, which is multiple choice. There is also a place in this section for the employee to share his or her reason for leaving, which will not be addressed here. The second section of the questionnaire consists of 17 issues in which the employee rates their answers from *Excellent* (1) to *Poor* (4), or *No Opinion* (5). The responses to these questions and issues will be the focus of the comparison and contrast between the two groups.

### 1. Section I

As was discussed in the introduction, many of the questions in this section relate to core issues which can be invaluable to an organization.

The seven yes/no questions in this section are:

- *Did you understand the mission of the agency?*
- *Did you ever offer suggestions, relate problems, seek advise or request information from management?*
- *If yes, was management responsive?*
- *Were you informed regarding changes in policies, procedures and practices of the agency?*
- *Would you consider returning to work for this agency?*
- *Were the duties and responsibilities of your position clearly explained to you?*
- *Do you feel you received adequate training to perform your job responsibilities?*

The one multiple choice question in this section is:

- *Check the one that best describes your workload:*
  1. *Too much for one person*
  2. *Occasionally heavy, but just about right most of the time*
  3. *Just right, not really over or under worked*
  4. *Not enough, did not fully take up my time*

## 2. Section II

The 17 issues in this section which require a respondent to rate their answer from 1 to 5 are as follows:

- *Communication between myself and the supervisor*
- *Relationship with my supervisor*
- *Guidance from my supervisor*
- *Relationship with co-workers*
- *Advancement opportunities*
- *Rate of pay for my job*
- *Cooperation and teamwork*
- *Resolving complaints or problems*
- *Working conditions*
- *EPMS program*
- *Fair and equal treatment*
- *Agency recognition program*
- *Communication within the agency*
- *Communication within my division*
- *Agency training programs*
- *Orientation*
- *State government benefit package*

### D. Methodology

The method used to compare the responses in Section I involved totaling the number of “yes” responses and “no” responses for both groups (*Before* and *After*) and comparing the percentages that these numbers represented, in order to determine if there was a difference in responses.

The method used to compare the responses in Section II involved totaling the number of responses in each of the five choices possible in each question. A mean of those numbers was then obtained by multiplying the number of responses in each choice times the numerical value assigned to that choice (1 representing Good through 5 representing No Opinion) and dividing the total by the number of total



responses to the question. The mean for each question was then compared for the *Before* and *After* groups.

In addition to the above-referenced indicators, overall patterns between the two groups were examined.

#### E. Results

Table I shows the seven questions that required a yes/no response with a breakdown of the responses for the two groups. The table shows the percentage values as well as the raw number of responses by both groups.

**Table I**

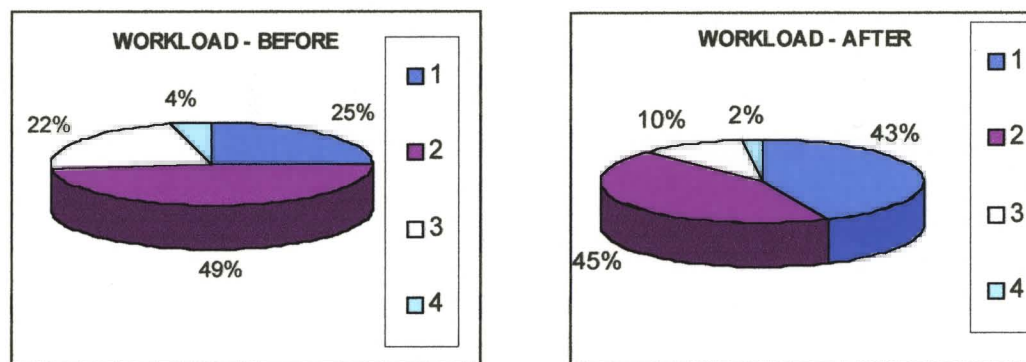
	<i>Before</i>			<i>After</i>	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
	# (%)	# (%)		# (%)	# (%)
<i>Did you understand the mission of the agency?</i>	98 (98)	2 (2)		100 (100)	0 (0)
<i>Did you ever offer suggestions, relate problems, seek advice or request information from management?</i>	92 (92)	8 (8)		89 (89)	11 (11)
<i>If yes, was management responsive?</i>	84 (92)	7 (8)		72 (83)	15 (17)
<i>Were you kept informed regarding changes in policies, procedures and practices of the agency?</i>	91 (96)	4 (4)		91 (94)	6 (6)
<i>Would you consider returning to work for this agency?</i>	87 (91)	9 (9)		85 (86)	14 (16)
<i>Were the duties and responsibilities of your position clearly explained to you?</i>	94 (94)	6 (6)		84 (87)	13 (13)
<i>Do you feel you received adequate training to perform your job responsibilities?</i>	84 (84)	16 (16)		82 (83)	17 (17)

As the table shows, for four of the seven questions, the responses by the two groups were within three percentage points or less of each other. The response which

had the largest variation was to the question of: *Was management responsive (to the employee offering suggestion, relating problems, seeking advice or requesting information)?* The responses to this question were 92% yes for the **Before** group versus 83% for the **After** group, which is a -9% difference. The next highest variation in responses was to the question: *Were the duties and responsibilities of your position clearly explained to you?* To this question, the **Before** group had 94% yes versus 87% yes for the **After** group, which was a -7% difference.

Of all of the questions asked, the only one to which the **After** group responded with a larger yes percentage than the **Before** group was to that of whether the employee *understood the mission of the agency*.

The results of the responses from the two groups to the multiple choice question are shown in the pie charts below.



**Legend:**

- 1 - Too much for one person
- 2 - Occasionally heavy, but just about right most of the time
- 3 - Just right, not really over or under worked
- 4 - Not enough, did not fully take up my time

As the pie charts show, there is an 18% difference in how many respondents chose option 1 (Too much work). Of the 99 responses to the question from each group, 25 in the **Before** group chose this option, while 43 in the **After** group did so. Option 3 (Just

right) had the second highest difference, that of 12%. Twenty-two of the *Before* group chose this option, while only 10 of the *After* group did so. The least amount of variation between the two groups appears to be in the choice of Option 2 (Occasionally heavy) and Option 4 (Not enough work). The greatest variation either one of these options had was that of Option 2 which was 4%.

The mean responses to the 17 issues which required selecting one of five choices was statistically analyzed. A student's t distribution test was employed for the means of the two samples. At the 95% confidence level, there is a statistically significant difference between the average scores of respondents in the two groups. (See Appendix C) This supports the original contention of the study which is that the *After* group was more negative in their overall responses in this section.

### III. DISCUSSION

As the results show, in each section of the exit interview questionnaire examined, resigning employee responses do differ significantly according to the method of administration of the questionnaire. Responses of the *After* group appear to be less favorably disposed to conditions in the organization. Since ex-employees who are given the questionnaires by the Human Resources office have more perceived freedom to express their opinions about the organization, this was not unexpected. Employees who have good things to say about their ex-employers have no reason to hold back in their responses, regardless of how the questionnaire is administered.

The responses by both groups to the 17 issues are also graphed and are shown in the Appendix B. While the graphs show differences between the two groups to each of the issues, again in a generally less favorable way by the *After* group, it is noteworthy that the patterns of choices are remarkably similar between the two groups. (See Appendix B)

It must be mentioned that not all responses were different between the two groups. This might lead one to conclude that while differences in responses have emerged as a result of this new procedure, some responses may not be affected by the change and may have been an accurate reflection of the ex-employees' sentiments.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The results of this study appear to support the original proposition that the two groups examined would have different responses. The Department of Social Services has made a change in procedure that seems to be a positive step. Apparently, this change may afford ex-employees the opportunity to share honest and valuable feedback which may be critical to the organization. If improvement is one of an organization's goals, then certainly it must be willing to accept such feedback as being essential in that process.

## V. SOURCES CONSULTED

- Buhler, Patricia M. "The Exit Interview: A Goldmine of Information," Supervision 63 (April 2002) : 15-17.
- French, Donna. "Gleaning Value from the Exit Interview," Association Management 54 (June 2002) : 72.
- Harris, Don H. "The Benefits of Exit Interviews," Information Systems Management 17 (Summer 2000) : 17-20
- Hinrichs, John R. "Measurement of Reasons for Resignation of Professionals: Questionnaire Versus Company and Consultant Exit Interviews," Journal of Applied Psychology 60 (August 1975) : 530-532.
- Levin, Robert and Levine, Joseph. Talent Flow. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press, 2001.

**South Carolina Department of Social Services  
EXIT INTERVIEW FOR EMPLOYEES**

**DEPARTING EMPLOYEE:** Your answers and comments regarding this exit interview are important to us. Please complete the form and mail it to the Human Resource Management Division in the attached postage paid business reply mail envelope.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ SSN: \_\_\_\_\_ Division/County: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Hire Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Day of Employment: \_\_\_\_\_

**Section I (Completed by Departing Employee)**

1. Please indicate your reason for leaving: \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |   |                             |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| 2. Did you understand the mission of the agency?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3. Did you ever offer suggestions, relate problems, seek advice or request information from management? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4. If yes, was management responsive?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5. Were you kept informed regarding changes in policies, procedures and practices of the agency?        | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6. Would you consider returning to work for this agency?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7. Were the duties and responsibilities of your position clearly explained to you?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 8. Do you feel you received adequate training to perform your job responsibilities?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes  | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 9. Check the one that best describes your workload:   |   |                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much for one person.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Just right, not really over or under worked. |                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally heavy, but just about right most of the time.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough, did not fully take up my time.   |                             |

**Section II**

Please use the following rating scale to record your responses in this area.											
	1 - Excellent		2 - Good		3 - Fair		4 - Poor		5 - No Opinion		
1. Communication between myself and the supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	10. EPMS program	1	2	3	4	5
2. Relationship with my supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	11. Fair and equal treatment	1	2	3	4	5
3. Guidance from my supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	12. Agency recognition program	1	2	3	4	5
4. Relationship with co-workers	1	2	3	4	5	13. Communication within the agency	1	2	3	4	5
5. Advancement opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	14. Communication within my division	1	2	3	4	5
6. Rate of pay for my job	1	2	3	4	5	15. Agency training programs	1	2	3	4	5
7. Cooperation and teamwork	1	2	3	4	5	16. Orientation	1	2	3	4	5
8. Resolving complaints or problems	1	2	3	4	5	17. State government benefits package	1	2	3	4	5
9. Working conditions	1	2	3	4	5						

Do you have any suggestions for improving the above? \_\_\_\_\_

What did you like about your job and the agency? \_\_\_\_\_

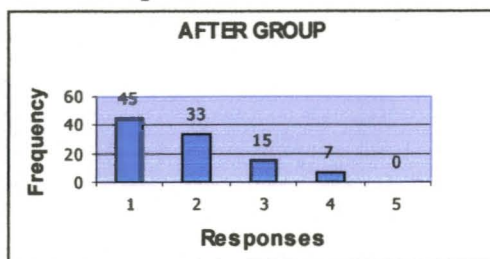
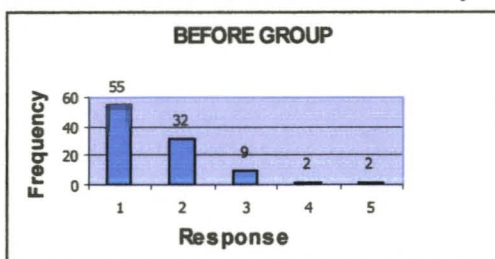
Please share any additional comments or suggestions by using the reverse side of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Departing Employee

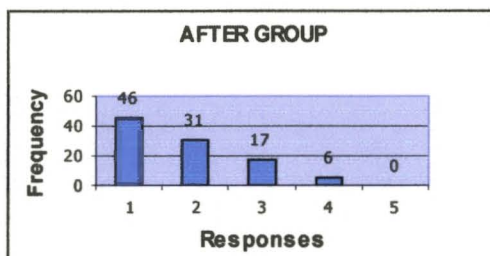
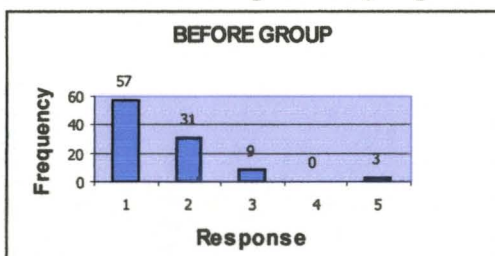
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Date

## Appendix B

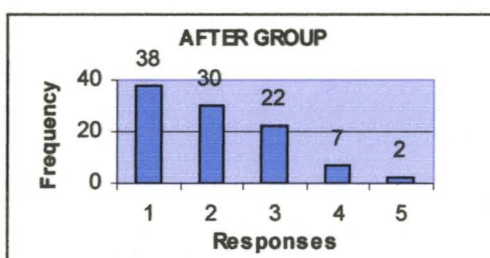
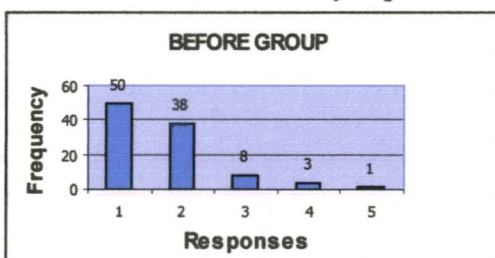
### Issue 1: Communication between myself and the supervisor



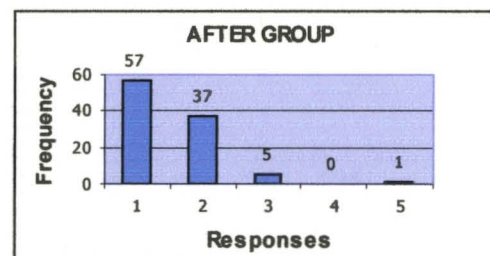
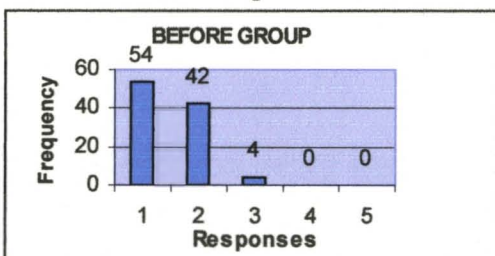
### Issue 2: Relationship with my supervisor



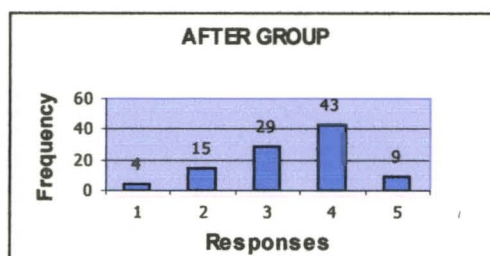
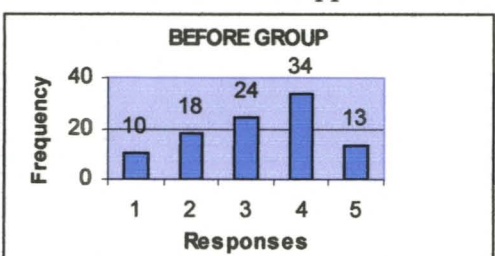
### Issue 3: Guidance from my supervisor



### Issue 4: Relationship with co-workers



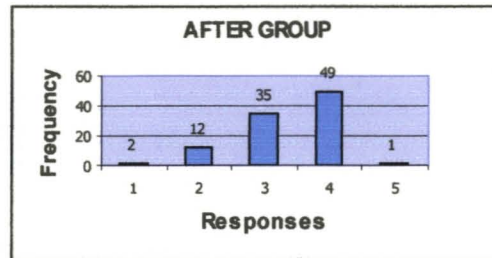
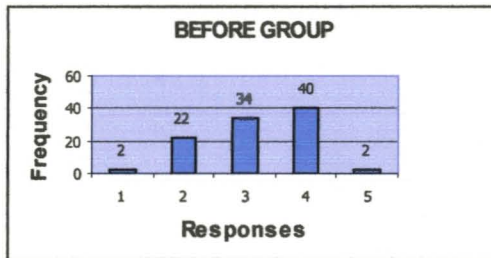
### Issue 5: Advancement Opportunities



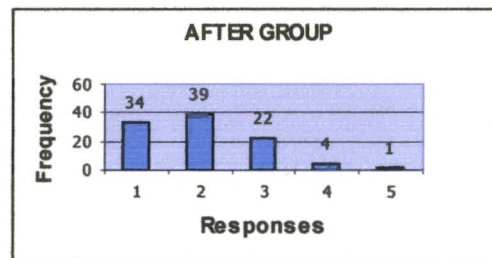
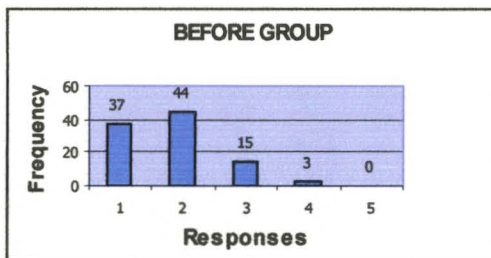


## Appendix B (Cont'd)

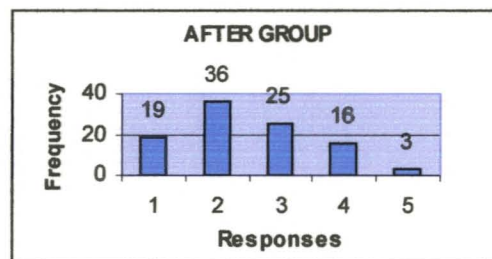
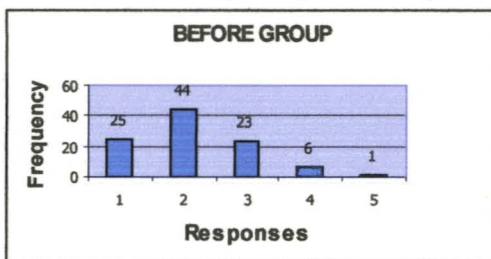
### Issue 6: Rate of pay for my job



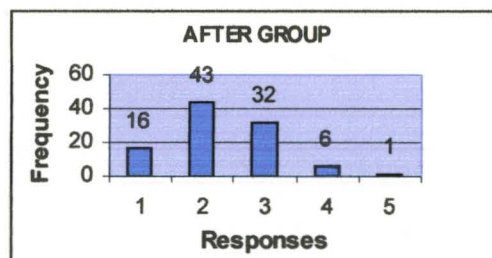
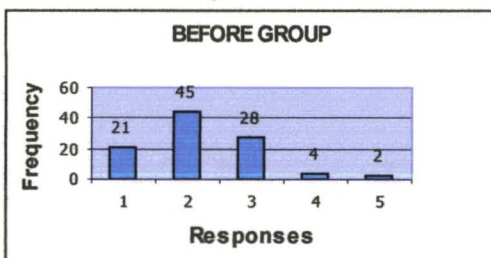
### Issue 7: Cooperation and teamwork



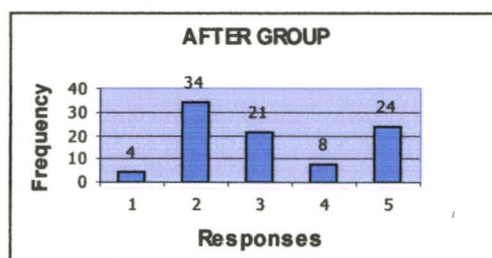
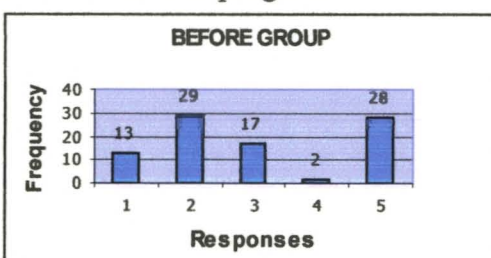
### Issue 8: Resolving complaints or problems



### Issue 9: Working Conditions



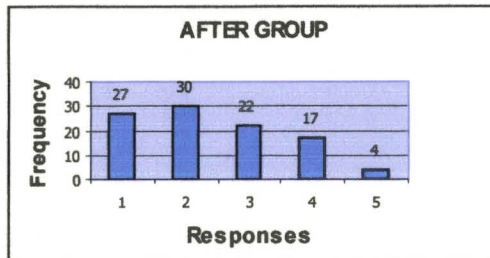
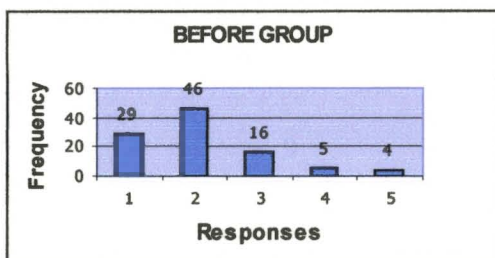
### Issue 10: EPMS program



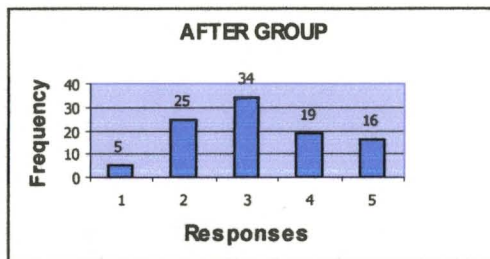
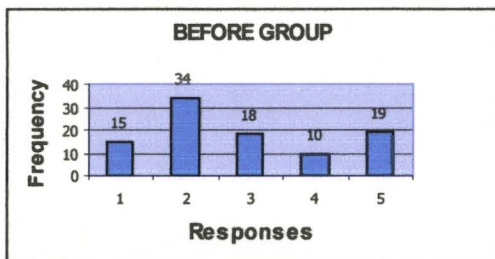


## Appendix B (Cont'd)

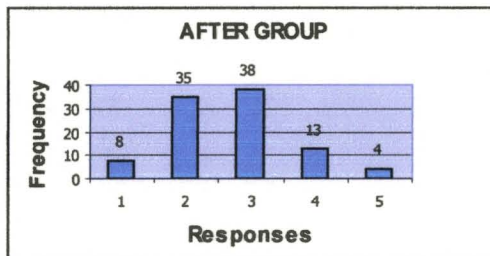
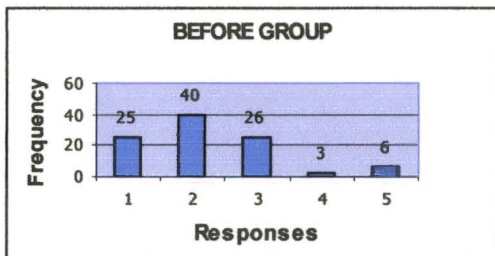
### Issue 11: Fair and equal treatment



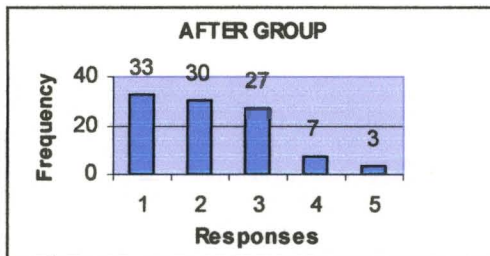
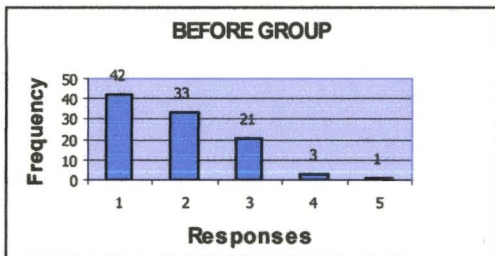
### Issue 12: Agency recognition program



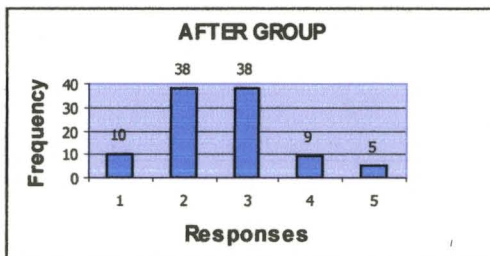
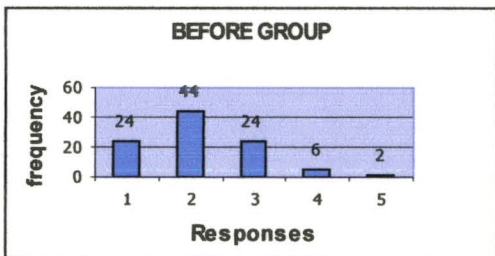
### Issue 13: Communication within the agency



### Issue 14: Communication within my division

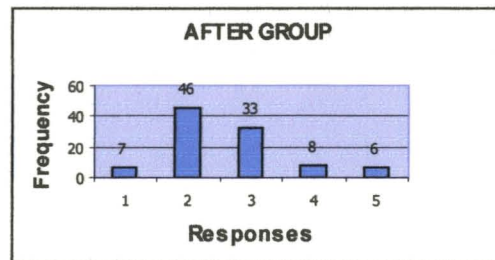
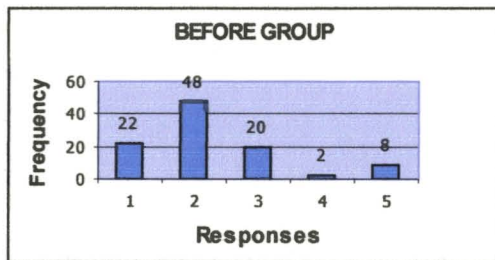


### Issue 15: Agency training program

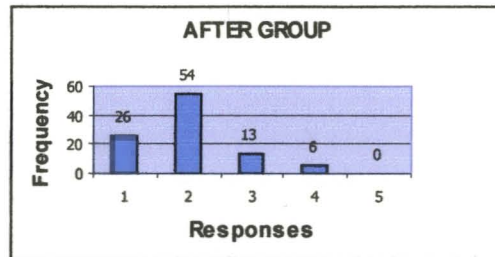
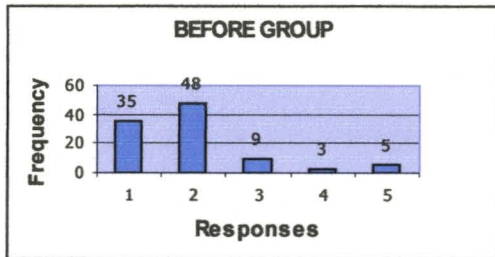


## Appendix B (Cont'd)

### Issue 16: Orientation



### Issue 17: State government benefits package



## Appendix C

	Before	After
Issue 1	1.64	1.84
" 2	1.66	1.83
" 3	1.67	2.04
" 4	1.5	1.51
" 5	3.22	3.38
" 6	1.04	3.35
" 7	1.84	1.99
" 8	2.13	2.47
" 9	2.21	2.32
" 10	3.03	3.1
" 11	2.09	2.34
" 12	2.83	3.16
" 13	2.25	2.69
" 14	1.88	2.17
" 15	2.18	2.61
" 16	2.26	2.6
" 17	1.95	1.99

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	2.081176471	2.434705882
Variance	0.307873529	0.315151471
Observations	17	17
Pearson Correlation	0.563740942	
Hypothesized Mean Di	0	
df	16	
t Stat	-2.795798711	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.006476562	
t Critical one-tail	1.745884219	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.012953125	
t Critical two-tail	2.119904821	